

2011

# The Oneida hymn-singing tradition

Karim M. Tiro

Xavier University, [tiro@xavier.edu](mailto:tiro@xavier.edu)

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Tiro, Karim M., "The Oneida hymn-singing tradition" (2011). *The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation From the Revolution Through the Era of Removal*. 1.

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# The Oneida hymn-singing tradition

*...their singing exceeded anything of the kind that I remember to have heard, the voices of the squaws were truly melodious...*

—James Emlen of Philadelphia, 1794

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century documentary record is replete with favorable comments about the Oneidas' hymn singing. The historical and cultural significance of Oneida hymnody is discussed in *The People of the Standing Stone*.

But what did it sound like?

We can get some idea by listening to the following recordings made in 1998 by the Oneida Singers. Based in Wisconsin, the Oneida Singers continue to preserve the Oneida-language hymn-singing tradition.

Click in the boxes to hear these hymns. The Oneida-language hymnal currently in use appears on the next page.

*Amazing Grace* (John Newton, 1725-1807)



*Rock of Ages* (Augustus M. Crosby, 1740-1778)



The singers on this recording are: Bev Anderson, Alberta Baird, Marge Broberg, Carol Cornelius, Dellora Cornelius, Josie (Cornelius) Daebler, Melinda Doxtator, Prudence Doxtator, Madelyn Genskow, Rose Johnson, Betty McLester, Lorraine Metoxen, Mary Parkhurst, Lois Powless, Theresa Powless, Carol M. Robelia, Marie Scott, Delores Skenandore, Opal Skenandore, Archie Archiquette, Benjamin R. Cornelius, Franklin L. Cornelius, Gerald E. Cornelius, Harry Cornelius, Leonard Cornelius, Terry A. Cornelius, Gordon McLester, Kirby Metoxen, Daniel A. Summers. Readers of *The People of the Standing Stone* will find many of these surnames familiar.

--123: Rock of Ages--

1. ye zos su gwa no lu kwa  
dyo tgut de su gwa hal ha  
uh ga a dya geh dah gwe  
yah ze ta ya i he ye  
nok a ya go ya da ne  
a ya gun he ge dyo tgut

2. uh ga no na ya yu we  
a sa go yu ne sga na  
ne ji da yu tgah du nyu  
go wa na u we za cla  
sga na a yu mih du nyu  
ne no na ya ha yu we

3. no na ah za du goh de  
ga to ne uh wa ja ge  
da ga ah zel hek ni ze  
ya ga tu zah za tge cgo  
la wa ze ne lo ya nel  
a gwe gu a ju tge cgo

## 176 Amazing Grace

1. das gwa ni gu has se la go  
ji ni gal lo no da  
ji wa dwa gya du go da gwe  
ji wa gli wha ne la

### chorus

yo dlac<sup>t</sup> do wa ga dya da du  
ok na sa gya do lau  
de wa gat ga gwe gu yo dlac<sup>t</sup>  
ok nu wa gat' gat to

2. la wa ni yo la o cha sta sli  
la gli hu ya ni i  
ha gwe li ga li wi yo stak  
ha gwe lya ne sga na

### chorus

yo da sgact lo o cha sta sli  
wa ha gya do la ne  
ne ji ne ga wi sta eks ne  
dwa ge da gwa ni i

Contemporary Oneida hymnal

The Oneida Singers are the subject of Terence O'Grady's "The Singing Societies of Oneida," *American Music* 9 (1991): 67-89. They were included in the 2004 Smithsonian Folkways CD, *Beautiful Beyond*. In 2008, they were awarded a National Heritage Fellowship Award by the National Endowment for the Arts.

My thanks to Gordon McLester for making these recordings and hymnal excerpts available.